

BOOK REVIEWS ▪

Calzada-Mayronne, J. (Ed.) 2021. *The State of Urban Education*. (27 pages). U.S.A.: Urban Ed. Press. ISBN 979-875-193-035-6.

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This book centers on current issues in urban education in the United States of America, specifically within inner city public and charter schools in New York City and New Jersey. Issues of access to quality education, support for students with learning disabilities and the plight of the urban educator are shared. As well, support for art education and for the craft of the artist surviving in large urban areas where holding multiple jobs allows for survival. The book is divided into four chapters, each written by educational protagonists who share their plight in essay form. Chapter one explores exclusionary practices. Chapter two systematic racism and educational needs. Chapter three shares ideas about an unbiased curriculum, and chapter four explores gaps in educational opportunities.

As a backdrop to this outstanding collection of essays, I would like to include some detail about current issues in North American educational settings. As per legislation (developed in 2009, released in 2010 and adopted by 2011) a common curriculum has been in place in the United States and subsequently revised to ensure inclusionary practices. This mandated program (Common Core State Standards Initiative) has been instituted in public schools. Supported and enforced by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) parents, educators, policymakers, etc. have access to the curriculum, its standards, and instructional resources. Forty-one of the fifty states have voluntarily adopted it and it is known as the Common Core. For those states who have opted out from adopting this common set of instructional standards in mathematics and literacy, public money and resources to that effect are not allocated, indicating that the state who has excluded itself from these standards has its own public resources to handle its educational needs.

The Common Core is a U.S. Federal Government funded effort to provide the highest level of educational practices and is continually revised and updated. Resources, materials, and training are provided on a regular basis for its implementation. As a mathematics educator in the state of New York, I was involved in its training, application, and implementation for the past eighteen years. Teachers, students, and parents alike have learned to learn within these standards together. The expectation is that North American students develop higher literacy and numeracy skills to allow them to be “college-ready” and to join a more skilled workforce in the twenty-first century. These Common Core Standards have been revised and upgraded. I have written extensively on the application of mathematics instruction, worked closely with newly trained teachers and assisted parents in understanding the nuances of teaching mathematics in a clearer and more dynamic manner. In terms of literacy development, this new set of standards has amalgamated the instruction of various topics into one allowing learners to enjoy history, science, and art in

a more literacy-rich environment. To that effect, I too have participated in the implementation of these highly creative literacy formats allowing learners to become better readers and ultimately, to develop a more critical outlook on what they read. One of the strengths of these new standards is that students explore authentic materials, historical artifacts, and electronically supplied resources to enable them to view the real world as it plays out. The federal government provides funding and assistance to upgrade school's technological needs based on the school's eligibility for funds. Often, better endowed school districts with a higher tax base benefit from school improvement funds on their own. However, funds are available to eligible applicants nation-wide.

Charter schools are slightly different from public schools in the United States. Depending on the supporting tax-base where they exist, they receive some public funds. They vary from state to state. Some states in the United States do not support charter schools, especially as some cater to varying curricula. In certain urban areas like New York City, depending upon the tax-base that supports them, charter schools cater to the arts, and other educational specialties. Eligible students can participate as long as they comply with requirements, and parents agree with the type of education they impart.

Issues of inclusion, race & ethnicity, access to resources, and opportunity are handled in a true-to-life manner. Each author, invited to share his/her views on contemporary, daily educational issues, opens up a myriad of constraints and stumbling blocks that are handled with intelligence, fortitude, and courage.

To situate readers within these constraints, let us describe them as follows.

1. Exclusion
2. Racism
3. Bias
4. Trauma

Contributors to this publication (Kennedy, Lluen, Calzada, & Calzada-Mayronne hold administrative positions in schools, are learning specialists, artists, & special education coordinators. They express their views and experiences tacitly, fearlessly and in rich detail. Let us highlight each one's participation as we continue to analyze this very special collection of educational issues in urban areas.

In terms of exclusionary practices in schools, Hannah Kennedy, Vice-Principal at a New Jersey charter school looks with a critical eye on outdated practices, especially when it involves disciplinary measures towards African American children. She hopes for progressive reform she recommends SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) mechanisms to provide students and educators alike tools for managing emotions, dealing with trauma, talking things through, and not relying so much on the criminal justice system which over-reacts when called to mediate.

Lluen describes systemic racism vis-a-vis educational needs stating that as recently as 1960 African Americans were taught in segregated school settings. As a learning specialist, she describes the little support provided to African American students who to this day attend poorly funded schools lacking in appropriate educational structure and means. Not only are these inner-city urban schools deprived of adequate physical environments for learning; these institutions deprive their students of growth opportunities as well.

Calzada, an artist residing in New York City, who teaches his craft in an inner-city school also describes the plight of talented youth who because of their race, ethnicity, and low-income origin are deprived of participating in the world of art. In great detail, Calzada describes how talented African American youth are discouraged from pursuing their artistic dreams and veered towards embarking on skills-based, entry level ones.

Calzada-Mayronne, a Special Education Coordinator takes up the last chapter of this wonderful book. She shares what she calls the “Trauma Triangle”. She describes how trauma intercepts learning and continues to propose “restorative” practices to assist students who have experienced trauma.

In the United States, the IDEA Act 1990 (Individuals with Disabilities Act) is legislation from 1975 with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA or EAHA) which protected Handicapped Children. In 1990 it was refined to provide special and inclusive education. These laws are designed to provide for and protect students with disabilities. However, as per the essays presented in this, the 2021 *The State of Urban Education*, certain schools and children are left behind despite them.